

Responsible Fisheries Course for the Pacific Islands

Twenty-eight participants from 12 Pacific Island countries successfully completed a two-week course on responsible fisheries in the Pacific Islands region. The course which ran from July 9-20, 2007 focused on the implementation of post-UNCED international instruments.



Some of the course participants and instructors

The course, which has been offered twice since its development in 2000, continued as a platform for enhancing the skills of fisheries officers in the management of migratory fish stocks in the region. With the coming into force of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean and many more regional and international developments, the course provided a

perfect opportunity for Pacific fisheries officers to stay up-to-date with these changes.

The scope of the course is comprehensively covered in six units, with an overall mastery case study, which the participants had to master in order for them to successfully complete the course. Some of the issues that were covered include the need to be aware of management advice that supports responsible fisheries management. While fisheries officers often get bogged down with many fisheries related activities, the legal framework is often an area that is neglected, or is seen as a non-fisheries officers' role or responsibility. The course dispelled this archaic assumption emphasising that fisheries managers need to be more active in the legal constructions of their fisheries legislation. The legal component is an important key to responsible fisheries management.



Building an Eiffel Tower – a group activity

Participation of all stakeholders is often a contentious issue in many communities, which sometimes can lead to feelings of distrust. The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which was developed by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 1995, strongly encourages the participation of all stakeholders in fisheries management. This participation can often foster stewardship of the resources, leading to their long-term sustainability.

The monitoring, control and surveillance of fishing activities are an important aspect of responsible fisheries management. A weak monitoring, control and surveillance system can often result in unsustainable exploitation of resources and eventually can cause the collapse of stocks. This would ultimately jeopardise the future of Pacific Islands and their sustainability.

Participants were also taught the importance of having a good in-house administrative infrastructure based on transparency and accountability. The administrative functions are often two-way communications, involving the sending out of information and analysing feedback and comments from stakeholders.

While the course was highly interactive, four components need a special mention. The role-play, where the participants acted out a scene involving illegal fishing by a foreign fishing vessel, proved to be an eye-opener for all. It certainly highlighted the need for fisheries officers and managers to be more aware of the various stakeholders, their roles and responsibilities in relation to fisheries management.

Another component was the field visit to the local fish market and a fishing company. The participants were fortunate to hear from the owner of the fishing company and the challenges that the fishing industry faced. The illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities remain a serious threat to the fishing industries and the overall management of the stocks.

The public presentations made by the course instructors on IUU and ports of convenience, and participants on Observer Programme in the Pacific, highlighted the massive challenges to be faced in managing migratory fish stocks.

The sharing of experience by the participants enhances the overall learning objectives of the course and provided many take-home messages for the group.

The Train-Sea-Coast Responsible Fisheries course was generously sponsored by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Forum Fisheries Agency's Oceanic Fisheries Management Programme. Additional support was provided by the UN-FAO, the University of the South Pacific, IOI-*OceanLearn* and UNDOALOS. It was organised and coordinated by the International Ocean Institute – Pacific Islands, under the guidance of Associate Professor Joeli Veitayaki, Dr Vina Ram-Bidesi and Mr Pio Manoa.

The participants expressed sincere appreciation to the sponsors and hosts of this enjoyable and informative course.



Leka Pitoi receiving his certificate from USP's Pro Vice-Chancellor